

9.

The Best Foundation.

BEING THE
SUBSTANCE
OF A
DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN
BIDDIFORD in DEVONSHIRE,
In the YEAR 1744.

By JOHN CENNICK.

Behold I lay in Zion for a Foundation, a Stone, a
tried Stone, a precious Corner-stone, a sure
Foundation, Isa. xxviii. 16.

Other Foundation can no man lay than that is laid,
which is Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. iii. 11.

THE FIFTH EDITION.

LONDON:

Printed and sold by H. TRAPP, No. 1 Paternoster-Row. 1788.

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M A T T. vii. 24.

“ Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and
“ doth them, I will liken him to a wise man,
“ which built his house upon a rock, and the
“ rain descended, and the floods came, and the
“ winds blew, and beat upon that house, and
“ it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock :
“ and every one that heareth these sayings of
“ mine, and doth them not, shall be likened
“ unto a foolish man, which built his house
“ upon the sand, and the rain descended, and
“ the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat
“ upon that house, and it fell, and great was the
“ fall of it.”

THIS is the conclusion of our Saviour's sermon upon the mount, and serves to teach us how careful we should be to have our hope of eternal life well-grounded, and our foundation laid sure, lest in a time of trial we should fail, and all our christianity and religion, like a structure ill-founded, should totter and fall, and leave us miserable for ever and ever.

This has certainly been the sad case with many who in their life-time would have it, they were well enough, were angry if any did but venture to question their safety, their knowledge in the mystery of godliness, or experience of grace, till perhaps the stroke of death, or the near approach of eternity shook their building, and they felt with

horror and distress, that they had only built on sand, and with all their boasts and false righteousness, have trembled to see all fall, and vanish away as the smoke out of the chimney.

In this weightiest of matters we cannot be too secure and safe, let us therefore consider the words of our Saviour, and learn of him, who built all things, to lay our foundation on a rock, that none of the dangers he mentions may come high us, and that in his day we may be called wise, and be found worthy, when heaven and earth shall flee away and be shaken terribly, to stand before the Son of Man.

I know how very ready many assertors and propagators of the doctrine of our own righteousness, are to make this text serve them; for, say they, The wisdom of the good builder consists in his having done all our Saviour's sayings, and not in hearing or believing only; and hereby some unwarily can be brought to doubt of the true doctrine of free justification through the grace and righteousness of Christ, and so build with the untempered mortar of their own works and merits, till the day of trial, and then all must fall, and great shall be the fall of it, for body and soul shall fall into hell, yea all, whatever is not built upon Christ and his merits, shall not stand; all else is sand, however specious and good in men's eyes, and so shall be found in the day of judgment.

In this discourse of our Saviour's, one thing is to be observed, and that is, that lest, amidst all his precepts and instructions (of which this sermon is full), his disciples should misunderstand him, and think their best obedience to these should be the ground of their acceptance with God, he says, "but first seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness"

teousness, and all these things shall be added unto you," Matt. vi. 33.

As if he would have said, "My disciples, I have now spoken my mind, and what also is my Father's will: After this manner should you think, and thus speak, behave, live, and do, but then be wise, and like a builder who is going to build, he first digs deep and finds the rock, and then lays his foundation sure, and builds safely; so ye first seek the kingdom of God that is in you, and his righteousness. This is your rock and foundation, before all things get this, and you shall build safely, all other blessings shall be given you over and above, but till you have found this you are not right; and should you go on to build, you would be like foolish men, who without a foundation build upon the sand. Ye hear my sayings, do as I bid you, first seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, for many will hear these sayings of mine and go away; first they will attempt to do works in their own strength and so make a righteousness of their own, and dream of having my righteousness to help out and make up the deficiency of theirs, and so without a foundation, build upon sand, and have all they do fall and burn up in the day that shall try all them that dwell upon the earth."

Our Saviour will not let a piece of his new cloth, his righteousness, which is everlasting and without fault before the throne, and which was wrought out and finished with so many years of pain and labour, go to mend our old garment, or patch up the filthy rags of our righteousness. He that cannot and will not trust the obedience of Christ, the righteousness of the Son of God, he may do what he will, he may build as he pleases, and make all men admire his wonderful works, and as sure as he lives

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he shall see all fall; for all is built upon sand, and without a foundation.

This is not the only place in the scriptures where our Saviour and his righteousness is called a rock, or foundation; for even in the prophets and in the Psalms, he was preached as the Rock of ages; and so Moses taught the children of Israel, and David so sung in the congregation of God. Deut. xxxii. 4, 15. Psalm lxxi. 3. lxii. 2, &c.

Isaiah also had done the same, when he said, "Thus saith the Lord God, behold I lay in Sion for a foundation, a Stone, a tried Stone, a precious Corner-stone, a sure Foundation," Isa. xxviii. 16.

This was the Rock Peter considered, when he said to our Saviour, "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God." Our Saviour says, "Upon this Rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," Matt. xvi. 18.

St. Paul says, "There is no other foundation, other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus," 1 Cor. iii. 11. And St Peter applies that place of the Psalms to Christ, "This is the Stone which was set at nought by you builders, which is become the Head-Stone in the corner," Acts iv. 11. It should not surprize us, that to some this rock is an offence, and a stone of stumbling. To all self-righteous people he will be so to the end of the world. The doctrine of his merit, his divinity, and righteousness, will for ever be discarded by such who have never seen through the deceitfulness of our performances and duties, nor known how sin has mingled with and spoiled all our holy things; but to the poor in spirit, to such as feel their fallen state, and whose eyes are open to their own misery, him and his righteousness will be precious, dearer than silver or fine gold,

gold, yea more precious and sweet than honey or the honey comb.

A soul who is wise to eternal life, is properly likened by our dear Master to a builder. Should one go about to build a house which he would have stand some hundred years, he would first dig deep, he would not value any pains to come at the solid ground, the firm rock, nor would he count it lost time to make this sure, but having found this, he could go on safely. So also is it with a sincere man; he will not be cheated with the form of godliness, he will not any more think, If I do all the good I can, that is sufficient, and should I fail at last, I hope Christ's righteousness shall make up the rest, for this would be indeed to make our works the first, and Christ the last, to be ourselves the beginning, and let him be the end. No, he hears the sayings of our Saviour, he is awakened to hear in his heart and to understand, and cannot readily satisfy himself, and cry peace, when there is no peace. His first thoughts are, I do not know the righteousness of God, I am a stranger to the kingdom of heaven, I have not yet received it in my heart. I will therefore not conclude myself a true christian, I will not look upon myself converted, or fancy I am a child of God, till I can say, surely, in the Lord have I righteousness.

He digs deep, and with tears and inward longing, and a thirst insatiable, he looks after a foundation that cannot be shaken, a rock that shall stand when the heavens shall wax old, and the earth perish, and all old things pass away, and no place be found for them any more. Though at times he enjoys many happy frames, passes some happy hours in the company of children of God, hears with delight the everlasting gospel, and often tastes the powers of the world to come, with a sort of ecstasy and rapture
not

not to be expressed, yet he is not satisfied till our Saviour is found of him, and has manifested himself to him, till he can say, I have found the Lord: In his deep wounds he lays his foundation; and on his righteousness rests fearless and safe. This is the Corner-stone which the builders have rejected: This was the foundation of the prophets and apostles: This is the Head-Stone in all God's building, "Whosoever believeth in him shall not be ashamed," Eph. iii. 20. Rom. ix. 33.

On the other hand, he is a foolish man, who, without much thought, builds upon the sand. His work may make a fine shew, and go on fast, but the first swelling flood, the first high tide, when the rains come heavy upon it, and washes away the sand, and when the wind blows and beats against it, it falls. Just so it is with a soul who, without understanding our Saviour, hears his sayings, and goes and seeks first his own righteousness; he pleases himself that his sincere obedience will do, and after he has done all he can, he shall get the kingdom of heaven. He does not seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and besides that all is sand, all is without a foundation and ground; and though a man may go far, and busy himself in his dry morality and good works, as he falsely calls them, he must sooner or later find it will not do, when he stands before the Judge of all the earth. Then when God weighs his prayers, alms, duties, honesty, and religion, he must see the hand-writing against him, "TEKEL, TEKEL, Thou art weighed in the ballance, and art found wanting." This shall be the hurt of all, this shall be the ruin and spoiling of the whole, he built without our Saviour, he was without the righteousness of God, he never found the rock, and perhaps never digged or sought after him, he ventured to stop short
of

of him, and to build without a foundation, and therefore he shall suffer the loss of all, and lose his own soul, his hopes and all he built on that sand.

David has that character, by way of eminence among the prophets, that he was the man after God's own heart; 1 Sam. xiii. 14. but yet however blameless he had lived in other respects, however religious and strict, yet he knew no righteousness could avail or help him but the righteousness of God, and therefore he prays, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant;" he knew he could not stand the trial, or be justified by his works, but says, "I will go out in the strength of the Lord, and will make mention of thy righteousness, and thine only," Psalm lxxi. 6. and this was the salvation and all his desire, when he came to die.

Think then how weighty, and above all other things this is necessary, that the kingdom of Jesus and his righteousness be found and made the Cornerstone, the sure Foundation of your souls. You must not say, how contrary to this doctrine many have preached and taught: "let God be true and every man a liar. The builders have now, as well as formerly, rejected this stone, and taught the people to lay first the sandy foundation of their own works and righteousness; but such rash and giddy men must one day be ashamed that they have done so, for they have taken away the Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him, they have made the preaching of Jesus an offence, and an occasion of stumbling, and the blind have led the blind till both fall into the ditch. O that the Lord would awaken such preachers to see their sin, that henceforth they might venture no more to lead the souls at random, but, like St. Paul, preach him only, and know nothing besides him and his righteousness, that so they might be the means

of saving themselves and those that hear them. A minister's wisdom and learning, in this respect, will be of little use to him, unless he has learned of the chief Minister that the rock is Christ; and if once he has happily found him, he will spare no cost or pains in his power to baffle and throw down all other things set up in our Saviour's room, he will make a babel of self righteousness, and as an idol treat every other pretended good but the only Holy One and his merits.

The fall of the Jewish church happened this way; they stumbled at the stumbling stone, they being ignorant of God's righteousness went about to establish their own, so did not submit to the righteousness of God. Yet St. Paul gives them thus far a good character, they had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, they sought righteousness, but they did not attain it; and wherefore? because they sought it not in Christ, they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law, Rom. ix. 31, 32, 33. and x. 2, 3. In this same way many thousands, called christians, have foolishly built, and been entirely ruined. O that God would save all that hear me to-day from perishing this way, and give all such a due concern about a matter of so great moment, that from henceforth none might rest till he had found the Lord, and laid his foundation deep in the cliffs of that rock.

There are two sorts of people who build upon the rock, and shall finally be saved; the first of these believe the doctrine I have been laying down, and with all their hearts know, all works done before the grace of Christ and the inspiration of his Spirit are not pleasant to God:* They are verily persuaded, that all things built upon any other ground or basis,

but

* See the 13th Article of the Church of England.

but upon the Lord, must fall, and therefore they cannot rest or be satisfied till they have found him; but then they afterwards deal foolishly, for instead of walking in Christ Jesus as they received him, under a sense of their own poverty and impotence, and so living daily, and going on and building in his merits and sufferings, his obedience and travail, his love and free salvation, they fancy that they must complete his work with their own works, and are always aiming at some high estate, and to perfect, as it were, his salvation. Their works are not simply and only to glorify our Saviour, but with a view to make themselves somewhat better, and out of a legal and beguiled heart, or rather from a puzzled and perplexed head, they seek to establish their righteousness upon the ground of Christ's; and though they never attain their ends, yet by such a fruitless and vain attempt they lose much, and their lives are not so happy and comfortable in the enjoyment of the Lord Jesus and his grace; and even these are they of whom St. Paul speaks, when he says, "they have built with wood, hay, and stubble, their works shall be burnt up, and they shall suffer the loss of them, &c. but they shall be saved, yet so as by fire," 1 Cor. iii. 12, 15. This fiery trial is in another place yet mentioned, and will serve to make the matter more clear. "A day shall come when the Lord shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver," Mal. iii. 2, 3. His fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is, that as when a refiner melts gold or silver he burns up the dross, or causes it to evaporate, so our Saviour, who will refine and purge the whole house of Israel, will purge away all those works done with a servile or selfish view, and what favours of pride highness, or what is self-righteousness under another name, or in disguise, or what serves to exalt man, or set up the creature. All this

shall be burnt up, but the soul justified and grounded upon him. (however in other matters they may have dealt weakly and foolishly) shall be saved; for what God has built upon the stone laid in Sion, shall not be lost, for our Saviour's honor and word sake, they shall be saved with an everlasting salvation. But such as I have now described, through their making so much of their works, and laying so little stress upon our Saviour, often trouble themselves exceedingly, and unless at some particular seasons of grace, or in some sweet frames, they are either very apt to doubt and be heavy, and so suffer loss unspeakable, or else through a sort of spiritual pride, and forgetting they were perfect only through the comeliness our Saviour had put upon them, they should be ready to think, my own works and faithfulness have done this, and so provoke God to strip them and make them naked and bare, as was the case of Israel, Ezek. xvi. 14, &c. so these suffer a loss also, and learn by painful experience, it is best to sit down at Jesu's feet meek and lowly, and rest wholly upon him like a poor sinner for ever.

The second sort of people who build upon the rock and shall be saved, are such as have deeply felt the fall and misery of their own souls, and who have learned of the Holy Spirit how ruined, helpless, and spoiled they were by nature, and who sought and found the Rock of ages, Christ Jesus, and whom no joy, grace, or blessing could exalt, but rather abase, and make more and more ashamed, before his gracious feet. These are the people truly zealous of good works, and for our Saviour's sake would rather die than grieve him: They pray, they hear, they love the ordinances of Christ, and do joyfully all his will. his commandments are not grievous to them; they shun what they can suppose would grieve

grieve him as a serpent, hating the very places where they have sinned, and the garments spotted with the flesh, but in the bottom of their hearts they make no righteousness of it, no terrible law has urged them on, or thundering judgments driven them to their strict obedience; love has constrained them, and out of a heart washed and made happy through the blood of the Lamb, they have done all their works, and with shame have been sorry that in all things they have come so short and failed; but they live upon the pardon and free mercy of Jesus, as at first, and know they are saved freely, and loved, not for works of righteousness that they have done, nor do they stand in the favour of God by means of their goodness, but in faith they stand, and through grace are preserved for his name sake, and built up in the knowledge and love of God: every fault or weakness they perceive, brings them nearer to our Saviour for forgiveness, and teaches them to cleave to him the more, to love him dearer, and to resolve to stay with him, and continue his poor and needy children. Such an one does not want to be high or eminent, or to be esteemed a saint, or better than another, but his highest aim is to please the Lord that bought him, his tender heart inwardly honours and lives to him, and he enjoys an uninterrupted happy season with his Redeemer. He gets more and more acquainted with him, and is more solidly built, rooted, and grounded in him. No forced conclusions from certain scriptures, or consequences of some favourite doctrine or scheme of religion are his support: he is not edified with fancies, but with a real intimacy and familiarity with our best friend, the Lord Christ, and by a sure knowledge of his heart toward him. This man builds with gold, silver, and precious stones, and when the fire shall try every man's works

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his shall stand, and his works be rewarded with his divine Master's approbation, "Well done good and faithful servant," and he shall not lose his crown of rejoicing.

There are also two sorts of foolish people who miss salvation; the first who hear our Saviour's sayings, but as lightly regard them as if they were of no consequence; and these never seek after happiness, but run on in sin, in drunkenness, blasphemy, whoredoms, careless and debauched livings, and, like as a horse rushes into the battle, they rush into hell, and these are really much to be pitied, though they pity not themselves. There is yet another sort who are serious, and profess a religious life, but superficially and without digging deep, and searching for the only rock and sure foundation, which is Jesus Christ; they content themselves in their good church, their religious customs, their pious deeds, charity, and prayers, &c. and this serves till a time of trial; but when death warns them to another world, and the close thoughts of standing before God in such a righteousness, the feeling no inward certainty or confidence of our Saviour's love, but a secret fear of departing, a mistrusting all, and finding that conviction, "Yet lackest thou one thing," they fail, and begin to cry out for some better ground. Sometimes the house built upon sand stands till the flood out of the dragon's mouth, which is persecution, ariseth, or when temptations, numerous as drops of rain, descend, or when every wind of doctrine blows against it, and then down it falls, and the soul, the cheated and deceived soul, is left wretched, naked, frightened, and miserable, and might be told before men and angels, Thou fool, without a foundation, thou hast built upon sand.

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In both these cases it is yet somewhat tolerable; for a person awakened upon his death bed, and convinced that hitherto he has deceived his own soul, may, and shall, when he turns to the Lord, find him a rock whereon he may trust, and shall thereby escape. Also one shook with persecution, or by temptations, or who by means of some powerful wind of doctrine sees his righteousness, which perhaps for many years together he had been building up, now thrown down in a moment, and is in distress, and wants a rest for his soul, may apply to the healer of his people, and find that man a refuge in the strong wind and tempests, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. But there are souls who will not be convinced of their folly till the great day, the day of decision comes, and then, however they have vaunted and stood proudly, however fine and gaudy their shew of piety may appear, if they have not found Jesus in their hearts, if they have rejected that head stone in the corner, and have not his righteousness, though they had in appearance the holiness of a cherub, it shall fall! the tempest of that day, the shaking of heaven and earth, and the presence of the Refiner, before whose face the angels are charged with folly, and in whose sight the heavens are impure, shall amaze them, and they and all their false hopes, their knowledge, and whatever else they could boast of, shall fall, and great shall be the fall: They shall tremble and shake before our Saviour, and sink down into the pit with all their religion, because they despised the elect stone which God laid in Sion, and would sooner and rather trust their own righteousness and goodness than the merits and righteousness of God our Saviour. In that day shall it be proved true, "Blessed are all they that have put their trust in him."

Since

Since then Christ is become the chief corner-stone, the foundation and ground of his poor people: let all here ask their own hearts, Am I built upon him? Have I by experience a right to say, The Lord is my rock, I have found the Lord? To such as have found him he is a precious and a tried stone; precious, since all who have him are thereby made safe and happy to eternity. And not only as God tried him, when he laid upon him all our sins, and visited our iniquities upon him, and he endured and went through the wrath, and proved a faithful advocate and surety of his people; but many thousand prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, and virgins, in all ages, have rested and built all upon him, and found him faithful. Their last hours were witness how he stood by them; they could depart rejoicing and fearless, nor did any of them depend upon him in vain. They trusted in him, and were holpen. They were built upon him, and neither fire, nor water, nor persecutions; nor temptations, nor life, nor death, nor satan, nor the gates of hell prevailed against them. They have overcome, they stood and fell not, because they were built upon the rock. The blood of Christ, like well-tempered mortar, bound them together and to himself, and now they help to make his temple, his eternal habitation.

Many millions who have presumptuously founded their hopes, and built on other foundations, have sorely felt their loss when they came upon a death-bed; and though perhaps before they scorned to depend upon Christ and his merits, and would not be of their religion who wholly rest on his grace, but chuse rather to confide in their good life, or repentance, or duties, or charity, &c. yet when the terrors of death came upon them, and they found themselves launching into eternity, and just going

to appear before God, finding their hearts fail, and all their fine and formerly admired structure totter, they have cried out for a Saviour and his blood, and have been glad to die as poor sinners saved by grace, and joined the happy company they once despised; but though this happens daily and in all ages, none who have laid their foundation on the rock, or trusted in Jesus, have thus changed in their last moments. No, death, let it come like a sweet sleep upon them, or rush on with all the horrors of persecution and bitter pangs, or sickness have shaken, much less overturned, their confidence in Christ; they have not repented that they honored him too much, or made too much of his free mercy and merits; nor have they warned others to beware of such a danger, or found him whom they believed and knew in the world, now leave them to perish, or forsake them when their strength failed them. O no: they all have rejoiced in his salvation, and thought and confessed, amidst all their weaknesses, agonies, and sicknesses, how blessed they were in having built upon this rock, and having got the Most High God for their Saviour. O how sweet and precious is the Lamb in a dying hour! to have him with us, and to be sensible his everlasting arms are underneath when we are expiring, and bidding all the world adieu, is above all things blessed. A soul in this case is not afraid, he is built upon the rock and shall stand.

May the great Master Builder, our Lord and Saviour Jesus, give us a deep foundation in him, and even when all other things give way and fall, may we have our eternal ground and safety under his shadow and in his wounds, and abide unshaken in his arms and everlasting love, living and dying, in time and in eternity. Amen.

C

A PRAYER.

A P R A Y E R.

O MY dear and loving Saviour, who art the true Rock and Corner-stone of all the apostles and prophets, and in whom they trusted and were saved, bear upon thy heart the poorest soul that ever called upon thy name. From that glory into which thou art now ascended, and amidst all the honours and praises with which thou art now surrounded, forget not me in my low estate, but remember me now thou art in thy kingdom.

Thou knowest my sincere desire to be saved, and to be with thee eternally; and lest I should be in any danger, O my dear Lord and Master, direct me to lay my foundation on the rock, and let thy Holy Spirit lead me deep into thy wounds, and settle, root, and ground me therein, that no power, tempter, or storm may ever be able to shake or remove me, world without end.

I pray thee let me not be foolish in thy eyes in this respect, or satisfy myself with any thing less than the sure enjoyment of thy presence and love in my heart. Let me experience thy favour, and be out of doubt of thy pardon, and in the truest peace of mind, and continual fellowship with thee, let me be thy disciple, and poor, but happy pilgrim in this life, and pass my days in the assurance of my eternal salvation.

For thy tender mercies sake suffer me never to be deceived, so as to build upon sand: O rather let my heart and soul unfeignedly rest upon thy blood and righteousness, and even in my last hour, and when thou shalt come again to judgment, let me be found built upon the Rock of ages, and without
fear

fear enter the valley of the shadow of death, and receive the message of the king of terrors. Let me undismayed hear the trumpet blow before thee in the day of thy coming, and stand before thee bold as a lion. Let me appear before thee clothed in thy righteousness, and wearing thy new name, having the Holy Ghost, till that blessed time, my daily Comforter, bearing witness with my spirit, that I am a child of God. Grant this prayer, thou gracious and almighty Lord God, my only Saviour, for thy love's sake. Amen.

A H Y M N.

I.

THE Rock, the precious Corner-stone,
 My soul has found, and builds thereon,
 And from the top she sees
 The glory of the world above,
 She takes a prospect of the grove
 Of everlasting trees.

2.

Here out of reach of ev'ry foe,
 She stoops, and views the world below,
 Beholds the desert lands,
 Where fiends conspire like winds and rain,
 And swelling floods, to shake in vain,
 The rock on which she stands.

3.

When high the stormy billows rise,
 And clouds prevent the clearer skies,
 My soul finds here a rest,

A bi'ing

A hiding-place till all is o'er,
The clefts I prove, secure and sure,
Where happy I am blest.

4.

Within this rock my soul descries
A thousand sacred rarities,
The place where Moses was
When he JEHOVAH's glory view'd,
The back-parts of the unseen God,
As through transparent glafs.

5.

Here one may also stand and see
Mount Tabor, and mount Calvary ;
And from this mountain's height,
A soul whose eyes are strong may view
Mount Sion, and the armies too,
Upon it cloath'd in white.

6.

On this eternal Rock are grav'n
The names of all who go to heav'n,
This stone God try'd and laid,
That all the church might build thereon ;
Christ Jesus is this chosen Stone ;
I'll trust him unafraid.

F I N I S .

25. AP 65